

Select Board Fiscal Year Report

In retrospect this year was much like many preceding years, full of the hundreds of tasks needed for the smooth operation of the Town's government some recurring, others demanded by circumstance. Among the recurring work is the approving various licenses, requests for temporary parking waivers and restrictions, street closings and acting on Town Meeting budget decisions especially regarding borrowing. These are all done with reflection on past practice (many are annual requests) and best judgment.

The details lie in the minutes available for anyone to see on the Town website and include a wide array of those important small and big issues. During the course of the year the Select Board discharged its responsibilities in helping the Town move forward in the areas of human rights, affordable housing, protection of the natural resources, supporting our citizens who need help, and maintaining an open political process so that all could be heard.

The Select Board's members are very active with many other boards and committees as liaisons to the Select Board and members. Each of these boards will be reporting on their work for the year. Most of those efforts are not included here except when these boards worked directly with the Select Board. The work outside of the Select Board is an important effort by the members and is especially valuable to the working of the Town.

There is not enough space in any report to fully expand on these tasks, their naissance, and resolution or to describe the breadth and amount of effort of the board but a few do bear note.

Town Manager's Review

One of the most important jobs of the Select Board is in creating and executing the review of the Town Manager. The year begins with updating the expectations of the Town Manager and setting goals. The document with the goals and expectations has been in place for a number of years but corrections and changes in emphasis are still being made. This year included particular concerns on low income housing and economic development.

The review was very positive: We are grateful for the skill, energy and dedication Mr. Musante continues to bring the tasks set by the Board.

Resolutions

Citizens bring to the Select Board issues that warrant a higher level of attention by the State Government than a direct petition. Resolutions vary widely in the purpose and action but in every event the Select Board determines whether it reflects the constitution of the Town. The Select Board often looks to standing Town committees to sponsor or support resolutions.

To strengthen the Federal Clean Air Act
To strengthen and celebrate our commitment to Human Rights
To celebrate the League of Women Voters' 75th anniversary
To celebrate trees and Arbor Day
To celebrate Puerto Rico Day

Affordable Housing in Amherst

The Select plays an important role in supporting initiatives for preserving affordable housing in Amherst. Housing projects can involve many agencies each with a different requirement for reporting and approvals. In the course of the year we were able to celebrate the successful culmination of a multi-year effort to build new affordable units at Olympia Oaks and to enter into the process of preserving affordable units at the Rolling Green apartments.

Special Town Meetings

The Select Board has an essential role in organizing and preparing Town Meetings. This year we had 4, beside the regular Annual Town Meeting and the customary fall Special Town Meeting we had a special Town Meeting in June for timely action on granting easements for various projects that would be undertaken during the current construction season in South Amherst and Pelham. As often happens there were a number of other items that needed Town Meeting attention that got added to the warrant including approval to acquire land to protect to Town's water supply and approve of budgeting Community Preservation Act funds for the preservation of affordable housing. Other citizen petitions to modify zoning were also included but without the benefit of prior public hearings and information were dismissed.

Also by citizen petition we had a Special Town Meeting to ask whether we would raise the minimum wage in Amherst despite State actions along the same lines.

Personnel Policy

The Select Board considered a number of recommendations by the Personnel Board to update the Non-Union Job Classification table to reflect current best practice and help staff positions move into a reasonable range in their classifications in terms of salary and promotion.

Establishing a School Zone

Among the responsibilities of the Select Board in looking after the Public Way includes the establishment of school zones that have special allowances for speed limits and the like. Most of the schools have long established schools zones the need for a new one near Wildwood was identified. The Select Board accepted the Public Works Committee's recommendation for creating this zone.

Proposed Housing Development

While planning is not a common responsibility of the Select Board, as the executive function in Town government we decided to engage with the process for the permitting of a large by-right development proposed for North Amherst. The size and scope of "The Retreat" was unprecedented in Amherst history and not entirely acceptable. The Select Board sent the Planning Board a letter that outlined the various concerns it had with the proposal. Also there was a great deal of public concern about the project and various attempts were made to stop it. Some the attempts included action by the Select Board. Unfortunately some of these attempts were illegal, and subject to the adjudication of Land Court, and others were inappropriate and would leave the Select Board in a compromised position. Fortunately the terrain and market conditions were realized to make the project untenable and it was abandoned.

Zoning updates that might mitigate the issues uncovered in this process have not yet passed Town Meeting.

March Disturbances

An unfortunate confluence of circumstances led to a serious altercation between thousands of unruly students and the Amherst and UMass police departments. No one was seriously injured in the end but the size and potential for damage and serious injury led to our serious and deep consideration of the why and what happened and what to do in preventing similar events. The University commissioned, and the Select participated in, a very comprehensive and detailed study of the event and got recommendations from recognized authorities. We commend the Amherst Police force for their actions that in large part protected the safety of the students and recognize their appreciation for what can be improved in the future to prevent these occurrences.

Budget

The budget process the Select Board help establish 7 years ago, which includes extensive collaboration among many boards and the Finance Committee, went very smoothly this year. For the first time in a while the future seemed less dark and uncertain, not enough to seriously increase spending but enough to consider adding funding to areas that were left behind during the economic crisis.

Miscellany

Parking regulations and fees, along with the multitudinous parking waivers the Select Board updated parking rules and fees on the recommendation of the Parking Committee. Otherwise the annual setting of fees for utilities and services the Town provides, establishing the tax rates bear mention but the process went smoothly there is little to report beyond the successful completion of the task.

Composition of the Select Board

At the Annual Town Election, Connie Krueger and Andy Steinberg won their election bids for Stephanie O’Keeffe and Diana Stein’s open seats. In the Select Board’s annual reorganization vote, Aaron Hayden was elected as Chair, Jim Wald was elected as Clerk, and the body voted to continue the practice of rotating the Vice Chair position alphabetically by last name each month.

I would especially like to thank the staff who support us in our work for the betterment of Town every day.

And we are most appreciative of Diana Stein and Stephanie O’Keeffe’s work as they retired from the Board in April.

It was a great honor for all of us to serve Amherst for the year.

Respectfully submitted;

Aaron Hayden, Chair